



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** October 27, 2022

**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS APPOINTS LAURA KAVANAGH AS FIRE  
COMMISSIONER**

**Ingrid Lewis-Martin, Chief Advisor to the Mayor:** Good morning everyone.

**Audience:** Good morning. Good morning.

**Lewis-Martin:** Let's do this again. Good morning everyone.

**Audience:** Good morning.

**Lewis-Martin:** Thank you for joining us today for this historic announcement. I am Chaplain, Dr. Ingrid P. Lewis-Martin, and I have the distinct pleasure of serving as chief advisor to Mayor Eric Adams. I am thrilled to be joined by several of my colleagues: First Deputy Mayor Lorraine Grillo; Deputy Mayors Meera Joshi, Maria Torres-Springer, Anne Williams-Isom, Sheena Wright; and the only male in the bunch, Phil Banks. Our chief of staff is also here, Frank Carone. New York — NYPD Commissioner Keechant Sewell. Yes. Come on, let's give her a hand. Corporate Counsel Justice Sylvia Hinds-Radix, Chief Housing Officer Jessica Katz, and dozens of other amazing women in leadership from across our city. As well as colleagues in government — the mayor's colleagues in government. We have Assembly Member Rajkumar, Assembly Members Rozic and Assembly Member Glick, as well as Council Majority Whip Selvena Brooks-Powers, Council Members Ariola, Schulman, and Restler.

Thank you all for everything that you do to make our city thrive, grow, and prosper. It is indeed my privilege and honor to introduce my partner in government for close to 40 years. A man who throughout his tenure in government as a New York State senator, former Brooklyn borough president, and now as the mayor of our glorious city who believes in the elevation of women. A man who understands the importance of having women in key and vital positions in his administration to — you know what we do — get stuff done. A man who has been cited and commended by the Office of the Public Advocate under Letitia James for having the most women in executive positions with the highest pay in all of New York City. Under his administration there is no glass ceiling.

I have the honor of knowing and working alongside Mayor Adams for decades and have seen firsthand his commitment to make sure that government reflects the diversity of the people that it is entrusted to serve. Throughout our time together, he has always focused on ensuring women and particularly women of color, have a seat at the table and it has helped us to drive policy for a fairer, stronger, and more equitable New York City. Just as he did when he announced that this administration would be the first in New York City's history with five deputy mayors, female deputy mayors, today's announcement represents another important step in this mayor's continued commitment to breaking down barriers. As I said, I will reiterate no glass ceilings in this administration. It is my utmost pleasure to present to you, because he needs no introduction, our 110th mayor, Eric Adams.

**Mayor Eric Adams:** Thank you. Thank you. It was... I know, Tommy just have... Give me my cards when you get a moment, Tommy. It was important for me to have Ingrid do the introduction because she's right. We talked about this moment for so many years of as we went through this journey together on our analysis of government, our analysis of corporations, our analysis of how we run cities and institutions. It's just always that men would be the face and the woman would be in place to make things successful. And when we built this team, we built this team with that concept in mind of making sure that we find qualified people to do the job. And that's what we hear today when you think about what Laura represents and it's not an easy task to go through the vetting process that she went through. Phil Banks led our national search and many people presented their resumes and their credentials.

Laura was going to be part of this administration no matter what. We knew her skill set, we knew her abilities, and I shared with her I wanted her to be part of our team from the beginning and she was willing to do whatever was needed. She said, "My heart is with the FDNY, but whatever way I could help the city, I'm willing to do so."

And while we put in place the national search, looking over several names and interviewing several candidates, I kept coming back to Laura over and over again. Over and over again, I just kept coming back to her leadership and how devastating it was when, as chief of the department, Laura and I had to respond to the fire in the Bronx and we lost members of the department just in the few months we were here. We lost firefighters, both to acting in their official capacities while putting out fires and then while on duty and being assaulted. And each time I walked into the hospital with her, each time I spoke with the family, each time we had to go to a scene, it didn't matter if it was 3, 4 a.m. in the morning, she was one ring away and many times she was there before anyone else. Her style of leadership and commitment is just a reflection of what this city has to offer. Yes, this is historic. The first woman to lead the largest fire department in the country.

So powerful and so significant. Just a moment that we have to think about this accomplishment for every little girl, for every mother who has just wanted their babies to have the same opportunities as others. Not to have a greater advantage, but just not to have a disadvantage. Gender should not define who we are and what we could become. And this is not the first, as Ingrid alluded to. There was no more proud and significant moment for me than when I was able to appoint Keechant Sewell to be the police commissioner of the City of New York.

And to the men who are here, what does that say about us? That we are willing not only to shatter the glass ceilings, that we are willing to say we are confident enough in our abilities that we could be side by side with our women leadership. The men of this city, you should be proud. You're sending a message to every agency and administration across the globe that the FDNY is the most important fire department in the country. And when you say, as men in this agency, that you will follow the leadership no matter what the gender may be, you are raising your standard as firefighters and you are willing to face the future head on. You earned the right to be called the bravest not only because you're willing to go into the flames of uncertainties in buildings, but the flames that keep our futures burned down over and over again. I take my hat off to the men and women of the FDNY for this moment.

Since February, Laura has served us well. She has served us in her role as the acting commissioner of the FDNY. She has done so much during her time here in service. She helped lead the FDNY's response to the Ebola outbreak in 2015. She was very much part of the COVID impact on our city in 2020, and continued her leadership under my administration as the acting commissioner. She directed a firefighter recruitment program that resulted in the most diverse applicant pool in the department's history, and graduated the largest and most diverse class of women in three decades. She has taken the lead in distributing smoke alarms at at-risk communities, thinking differently, and using technology like the new drone unit and Fire CAD System in the department's incident command app. This is allowing us to provide real time updates for fire units. And she has also made progress, reducing the backlog of business waiting for fire inspections, cutting the wait time in half.

New Yorkers in New York City's bravest deserve an exceptional leader, and Laura has the vision, skills, the compassion to lead the FDNY into the future. I thank her. I thank former commissioner, Commissioner Nigro for his leadership. Even as he transitioned from his leadership, he was clear that he wanted to be here to make sure we had that smooth transition. This is what makes us special as a city.

The continuation of knowledge and experience is allowing us to continue to function at the high capacity that we are. And this is so important for us to be here today with the visualization of the people who are part of our agency. Others are trying to write our story. Others are trying to put in the history books of what we have done and what we have not done. And my team, if we don't write our own stories, they would define it for us.

This has been an unprecedented team of leaders. So many firsts, from first allowing children to be screened from dyslexic. First increase the number of summer youth employment. First increasing in earned income tax credit, NYCHA's success. There's so much we have done. Yes, there's so much we have to do, but in order to accomplish that, you must build the right team, and no one is going to tell me how to build that team. The people of the city elected me to be the mayor of the City of New York, to navigate us out of these turbulent waters that we're facing. I built that team and that team consists of some of the best people in general, but specifically some of the best women the city has to offer.

And now it'll give me great pleasure to give the oath of office to our fire commissioner. I'm told your mom is here. I'm a mama's boy, so it's good. She's holding the Bible that was given to you

by your grandmother. I know this is a significant moment for you, and your grandmother's looking down on you. So if you would raise your right hand... I.

**Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh:** I.

**Mayor Adams:** Say your name.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** Laura Kavanagh.

**Mayor Adams:** Do solemnly swear that I will support.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** Do solemnly swear that I will support.

**Mayor Adams:** The Constitution of the United States.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** The Constitution of the United States.

**Mayor Adams:** The Constitution of the State of New York.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** The Constitution of the State of New York.

**Mayor Adams:** And the Charter of the City of New York.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** And the Charter of the City of New York.

**Mayor Adams:** And that I will faithfully discharge.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** And that I will faithfully discharge.

**Mayor Adams:** The duties of commissioner of the Fire Department of New York City.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** The duties of commissioner of the Fire Department of New York City.

**Mayor Adams:** According to the best of my ability.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** According to the best of my ability.

**Mayor Adams:** So help me God.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** So help me God.

**Mayor Adams:** Congratulations, Commissioner Laura Kavanagh.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** Thank you. Well, I was doing okay until I had to do that with mom, so forgive me. That was very special. So, thank you.

**Mayor Adams:** Put your speech down. Just hold that for a moment. It's really good. Get all your stuff out of the way.

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** See? Teamwork.... Getting stuff done.

Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for this privilege, this honor, and your trust and faith in me to lead this truly extraordinary department and its thousands of amazing, historic, dedicated people. To say it is the honor of a lifetime is an understatement. This story, my story, is a quintessentially New York City story. New York City's story is fundamentally one of making the impossible possible. Where a shy, introverted only child could get a one-way ticket to New York City seeking to serve a higher purpose in the best city on earth, and two decades later, find yourself here, leading the greatest fire department in the world through unprecedented times is something that could only happen here. Every person standing behind me, this mayor, and all of these women are stories that are simply not possible anywhere else. Look at this picture. I almost cannot believe it.

The FDNY too is about making the impossible possible: pulling lives from a wrecked car or from a burning building, bringing back people teetering on the cusp of death so that they can return home to their loved ones — of rebounding from the lowest lows to the highest highs. Our city, our department, stands above the rest. I know New York City is the greatest city in the entire world because I chose it. I have lived in every borough and I have worked in every community. This city is the love of my life and I am relentlessly optimistic about its future.

The FDNY makes up some of the very strongest strands of our city's DNA. It is seared into the psyche of New Yorkers. It is one of the most storied and hallowed institutions in New York and in the world. It touches thousands of lives every day without missing a beat, in raging infernos, or car crashes, or heart attacks, or superstorms, or terror attacks, the FDNY shows us that the very best of humanity is there in our darkest moments. That is because the FDNY is made of everyday people that we all know: a dad, a sister, an uncle, a daughter, people who answered the call to serve to do extraordinary things. Its strength comes from its people, from the bonds they've built, their bonds to one another, their bonds and their eternal commitment to our city, and their mission to serve and help others.

The people of the FDNY, 17,000 firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, fire marshals, fire inspectors and civilian personnel, have provided me with an enduring faith in something that I was raised with and I have long known to be true, that where you build a community, you create a force multiplier that does extraordinary things. This is the type of FDNY commissioner I will be one that knows that I will succeed only if every person in my department and in our city sees my place at the table as also their own. This moment, me being first, only matters if I am not the last.

Having a woman in this role is a change, but change provides opportunity. Change, in fact, is the only constant in life, and if we embrace it, change is a gift. It provides an opportunity to bring more people into the gift that is the FDNY. It is a reminder that we are alive and that we can move something we love forward to be even stronger. Change is what has made this department and this city continually stronger. It is why we are the best.

This is a new look for the New York City fire commissioner, but we should remember that our department has changed very much over its 157 year history and it has always emerged better for it over the years. Change is not about losing those core values that bond us and drive us: bravery, sacrifice, and service. No, change is about this department and this city getting continually stronger. It is why we are the best and we will always stay the best. It is why we have come back from the hardest times and the darkest days when we have been counted out.

Thank you, Mayor Adams, for having faith in me. Thank you to the men and women of the FDNY who inspire me every single day. Truly, you are the reason I get up in the morning. Thank you to my parents for giving me the exact right mix of love and toughness and for instilling a fierce belief that you can make the world a better place if you fully dedicate yourself to making it so. The FDNY has never met a mission that they could not complete. Let's get to work.

**Mayor Adams:** We're going to open the floor up, but I'm going to tell you be very careful because these women are not going to take any mess today. How are you doing?

**Question:** Hi. How are you?

**Mayor Adams:** Good.

**Question:** Today is a great day of celebration with everything that's happening. But we've also... It's always great to be the first, but it also says that you (inaudible). Can you speak to that?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes. Laura could respond as well. You're right. When Ingrid and I sat down and we did an analysis of just how many appointments we were going to do, we were blown away to see how many firsts we had to say. Part of the mission was that we stated that we were going to just open our eyes. The talent is all around us, but the fact is, we were just not opening our eyes. I will argue with anyone that appointing the first Latino to the Department of Correction — he is one of the most talented individuals in corrections in this country. We just had to open our eyes and look. Appointing the police commissioner, Keechant, is really shaping and taking this Police Department in another direction. Who would've thought in her short period of time she was going to have a double-digit decrease in homicide, double-digit decrease in shootings, which I said was my primary focus and what she's continued to do.

What this team has done. First Filipina deputy mayor in Maria Torres-Stringer, what she's doing. First Indian deputy mayor in Meera Joshi and what she's doing. We sat there and we were intentional. We said we're going to look for the best, but we are going to open our eyes because the best is among us. The best has just been ignored. You're right. For 2022, for us to still say, "The first," that's an indictment on what we have been doing. But today is a day when we're going to make sure the first is not the last. Commissioner?

**Commissioner Kavanagh:** Yeah. I just want to emphasize that I think that it is easy to say what we want to change. It is harder to do it, and one of the things I have appreciated about this administration is that we are dedicated to getting stuff done. And the mayor has made a real commitment to that. The women are there, the diverse talent all over the city is there, but it takes a leap to do something different. And I think that's what we've done here. I think it's what I've

done in the department. I think it's what you've tasked us with doing and that's what it takes. It takes making the leap, and we're finally doing that. I couldn't be more proud.

**Question:** (Inaudible) congratulations to the commissioner. She's been doing the job on an interim basis for months, overseeing a department with line of duty deaths and other high profile fires. Can you explain why there was such a perceived delay in making it official to make her officially the commissioner?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, and be honest, aren't you proud? Number one, I had to get it right. I understood policing and it was easy for me to look at the commissioners that Chief Banks and his team, Sheena, Ingrid, and the rest, vetted the commissioners for policing. It was easy for me to look it over and sit down and talk about the things that I needed in the Police Department and that's why it was easy for me to land on Commissioner Sewell. I didn't know FDNY. I didn't understand the culture. I didn't understand the agency.

This is an organization that is rooted in tradition, and you can't just drop anyone in FDNY. You'd better make sure you speak to... I had a number of conversations with the chief, the unions, the men and women. I would come in fire houses and slide down the pole and just ask them what their thoughts were about the commissioner. And I just had to get it right. It took the amount of time, and I had someone in place, and the house wasn't burning. She was holding it down.

And from the time that we spent together over the last 10 months, I just saw that like I said, I just kept coming back to the same person. I saw, I was hearing from the rank and file in the field. I was hearing from the men and women of the union. I was hearing from the leadership, and even when they critique, no one could take away her capabilities. And, like I said, I wanted her in my administration no matter what. I knew that I needed her leadership and it just was the right fit and it was the right time in Fire Safety Month. Before we get out of the month, let me put the fire out and say we have a fire commissioner. Thank you. Thank you everyone.

###